

William Wordsworth's Overcoming Life's Struggles in 'Intimations of Immortality' Poems

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how William Wordsworth addresses and overcomes personal and existential problems in his poem *Intimations of Immortality from Early Childhood*, a pivotal work in Romantic literature. The poem explores themes of memory, spiritual transcendence, and the transition from childhood to adulthood. There is a gap in understanding how Wordsworth uses them to confront his own struggles. The purpose of this study is to investigate how Wordsworth transforms personal challenges into sources of solace and insight. Through close textual analysis, the study highlights Wordsworth's use of the divine essence of childhood and nature as stabilizing forces that help him cope with personal loss and disillusionment. The findings suggest that childhood memories and nature offer enduring comfort, providing a philosophical framework for managing life's difficulties. The study concludes that Wordsworth's poetry serves as a powerful tool for emotional and spiritual growth, showcasing the transformative power of introspection.

Keywords: William Wordsworth, Intimations of Immortality, personal struggles, childhood memory, spiritual transcendence

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INTRODUCTION

William Wordsworth, a central figure in the Romantic Movement, is renowned for his profound and introspective poetry that delves deeply into the human condition. Among his celebrated works, "Intimations of Immortality from Early Childhood Recollections" stands out as a seminal text that reveals Wordsworth's intricate process of grappling with personal and existential challenges. This poem, composed in the early 19th century, reflects Wordsworth's attempts to overcome his struggles with disillusionment, loss, and the quest for spiritual meaning.

Wordsworth's life was marked by significant personal trials, including the death of his parents, the loss of close friends, and periods of melancholic reflection. These experiences prompted a profound quest for understanding and solace, which he sought to address through his poetry. "Intimations of Immortality" is a particularly poignant example of how Wordsworth engaged with his difficulties. The poem captures his reflections on the nature of childhood, memory, and the persistent presence of an immortal essence that, according to his view, connects the human soul to a higher realm.

The purpose of this study is to explore how Wordsworth utilizes his poetic craft in "Intimations of Immortality" to navigate and mitigate the problems he faced in his life. This exploration involves a close examination of the poem's thematic content, including its treatment of memory, the contrast between innocence and experience, and the philosophical

implications of immortality. By analyzing Wordsworth's use of imagery, symbolism, and emotional expression, the study aims to uncover how the poem functions as a personal therapeutic tool and a universal statement on human resilience and spiritual continuity.

In delving into the biographical and textual context of Wordsworth's work, this study will illuminate the ways in which "Intimations of Immortality" reflects his internal struggles and aspirations. It will also demonstrate how Wordsworth's poetic vision offers readers a framework for understanding and overcoming their own existential challenges. Through this analysis, the study seeks to underscore the enduring power of Wordsworth's poetry as a means of personal and collective transcendence.

Review of Literature

William Wordsworth's "*Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*" has been extensively examined in the context of Romantic literature, with a particular focus on its philosophical themes of memory, childhood, and spiritual transcendence. As one of Wordsworth's most celebrated works, it is often seen as a meditation on the loss of innocence and the transition from childhood to adulthood, reflecting his broader Romantic ideals. The literature surrounding "*Intimations of Immortality*" is rich with discussions of the poem's treatment of memory, nature, and spiritual reflection, though gaps remain in understanding how Wordsworth used the poem as a means of addressing his personal struggles and disillusionments.

Wordsworth's Romantic Ideals and the Power of Memory

Wordsworth is widely recognized for his contributions to the Romantic Movement, which emphasized emotion, individualism, and a deep connection to nature. Scholars like M. H. Abrams and Jonathan Wordsworth have emphasized the role of memory in Wordsworth's poetry, particularly in his ability to evoke childhood as a source of spiritual insight. Abrams (1971) noted that Wordsworth believed in the capacity of memory to connect individuals to their past selves, allowing them to access lost moments of spiritual clarity that adulthood tends to obscure. This view is central to "*Intimations of Immortality*", where the poet expresses a yearning for the divine essence of childhood, a time when the soul is closest to its spiritual origins.

Jonathan Wordsworth (1982) further expanded on this by analyzing how Wordsworth uses childhood memories to frame his understanding of the world. He argued that the poet's depiction of early life as a period of heightened spiritual awareness allows him to confront feelings of loss and disillusionment. Wordsworth's belief in the immortal essence of childhood, and its enduring presence even in adult life, gives him a framework to understand the natural progression of life, from innocence to experience. However, while much of the scholarship has focused on this thematic aspect, less attention has been paid to how these reflections directly helped Wordsworth cope with his personal trials.

Nature as a Source of Spiritual Solace

Wordsworth's relationship with nature is another central theme in the scholarship on "*Intimations of Immortality*". In his poetry, nature is not merely a backdrop but a dynamic, spiritual force capable of offering comfort and perspective. Critics like Geoffrey Hartman (1970) have explored how Wordsworth's portrayal of nature in the poem serves as a stabilizing presence amid the emotional turbulence of adulthood. Hartman suggested that nature in Wordsworth's work acts as a constant, unchanging force, helping the poet reconcile his feelings of personal loss and offering a pathway to spiritual renewal.

Similarly, Mary Jacobus (1976) analyzed the role of nature in "*Intimations of Immortality*", arguing that Wordsworth's poetic vision was deeply intertwined with his philosophical views on the cyclical nature of life and death. Jacobus highlighted how

Wordsworth's use of natural imagery – such as flowers, rivers, and the heavens – symbolizes the enduring connection between humanity and the divine. This perspective is crucial in understanding how Wordsworth coped with his feelings of mortality and the impermanence of life. However, while the scholarship has explored the symbolic use of nature, there is less focus on how Wordsworth personally engaged with these themes to address his emotional and existential struggles.

Personal and Existential Struggles in Wordsworth's Poetry

Biographical studies of Wordsworth have shed light on the significant personal challenges that shaped his poetic vision. The death of Wordsworth's parents at a young age, the loss of close friends, and his complex relationship with his own mortality deeply influenced his writing. Stephen Gill's biography of Wordsworth (1989) provides a comprehensive overview of the poet's life, detailing how these personal tragedies fostered a profound sense of melancholy and introspection. Gill argued that "*Intimations of Immortality*" represents a turning point in Wordsworth's career, where he began to use poetry as a means of grappling with these internal struggles.

Furthermore, scholars like Kenneth Johnston (1998) have examined how Wordsworth's poetry serves as a response to the disillusionment he felt in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Once a strong advocate for revolutionary ideals, Wordsworth became disheartened by the violence and chaos that followed, leading him to turn inward and seek solace in nature and the spiritual world. Johnston's analysis reveals that "*Intimations of Immortality*" reflects Wordsworth's attempts to transcend these disillusionments by connecting with the divine through nature and childhood memories. However, despite this biographical focus, there is still room for a deeper exploration of how the poem functions as a personal tool for overcoming adversity.

Gaps in the Literature

While the existing scholarship on "*Intimations of Immortality*" provides valuable insights into Wordsworth's thematic concerns, there is a noticeable gap in addressing how the poem serves as a therapeutic outlet for the poet himself. Much of the literature has focused on Wordsworth's philosophical and spiritual ideas without fully exploring how these ideas reflect his personal journey toward emotional and intellectual resolution. Additionally, while nature and memory are commonly analyzed as symbolic elements in Wordsworth's poetry, their specific role in helping Wordsworth navigate his personal grief and disillusionment remains underexplored.

This study seeks to address these gaps by examining how Wordsworth uses "*Intimations of Immortality*" to overcome personal and existential struggles. By focusing on the biographical context of the poem and conducting a close reading of its themes, imagery, and symbolism, this analysis aims to uncover how Wordsworth transformed his inner turmoil into a source of comfort and spiritual insight. The study will also explore how the poem offers broader reflections on human resilience, suggesting that Wordsworth's personal experiences resonate with universal struggles faced by all individuals. Through this investigation, the study will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of Wordsworth's work, emphasizing how "*Intimations of Immortality*" functions as both a personal expression of grief and a philosophical meditation on the human experience.

METHOD

Respondents

This study is a literary analysis of William Wordsworth's poem "*Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Early Childhood Recollections*." As a text-based research project, there are no human respondents involved in this study. Instead, the research focuses on Wordsworth's

poetic work itself as the primary "respondent," examining the text in relation to the poet's personal experiences, philosophical reflections, and emotional struggles. Secondary sources, including biographical accounts and previous critical analyses of the poem, will also be utilized to contextualize Wordsworth's personal and existential challenges as reflected in his poetry.

Instruments

The primary instrument for this study is close textual analysis, which will be used to interpret the thematic content, imagery, symbolism, and language in "*Intimations of Immortality*." This method allows for an in-depth exploration of how Wordsworth's personal struggles and philosophical ideas are expressed through his poetry. Secondary instruments include biographical research on Wordsworth and critical essays that offer insights into his poetic techniques and the historical context of the poem. These sources will be used to complement the textual analysis and provide a fuller understanding of how Wordsworth's life experiences influenced his work.

Procedures

1. Textual Selection:
The poem "*Ode: Intimations of Immortality*" was selected as the focal text for analysis because it is one of Wordsworth's most significant works and directly reflects his personal and philosophical concerns. Other related poems and sections from *The Prelude* will be briefly referenced to support the interpretation of key themes.
2. Textual Analysis:
A close reading of the poem will be conducted, focusing on how Wordsworth grapples with themes of childhood, memory, disillusionment, and spiritual transcendence. Particular attention will be given to the use of nature imagery, the contrast between innocence and experience, and the emotional tone of the poem.
3. Biographical Context:
Biographical information on Wordsworth, including his personal struggles with loss, disillusionment, and his search for spiritual meaning, will be incorporated into the analysis. The study will examine how Wordsworth's life events influenced the content and tone of "*Intimations of Immortality*."
4. Review of Secondary Sources:
The study will draw on critical essays and scholarly works that examine Wordsworth's philosophy, use of nature, and themes of memory. These sources will provide additional perspectives that will be integrated into the analysis to enhance the interpretation of the poem.

Data Analysis

The data in this study consists of the text of "*Intimations of Immortality*" and related scholarly interpretations. The analysis will follow a thematic approach, identifying recurring motifs, symbols, and ideas in the poem that reflect Wordsworth's personal and existential concerns. Key themes—such as the spiritual significance of childhood, the role of nature as a stabilizing force, and the reconciliation of loss—will be categorized and interpreted in relation to Wordsworth's personal history and broader Romantic ideals. To deepen the analysis, the study will apply relevant theoretical frameworks from Romanticism and literary theory. By comparing Wordsworth's personal struggles with the philosophical ideas presented in his poetry, the study will show how "*Intimations of Immortality*" functions both as a therapeutic tool for Wordsworth and a philosophical reflection on the human condition.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

How the William Wordsworth Overcomes Their Problems in Life through His Poems *Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*

Poetry is primarily an expression of poet's emotion (Peck and Coyle, 1984, p.11). According Abrams (1953, p.20), poetry is the overflow, utterance or projection of the thought and feelings of the poet. Livingstone (1991, p.7) also stated, a lyric poem is one that expresses the feelings and emotions of the poet. Poetry is seen not as conscious process but as natural surprise, an utterance arising from the non-rational processes of the mind. Unbidden associations and illuminations spring into the poet's mind and thence to the page (Wainwright, 2004, p.159). Many inspirations inspire the poets to explore everything in their mind through their focus. It is a medium of the poets for exploring their ideas and sharing their life experiences. Nevertheless, every poet has special ways in exploring their opinions focus. It happens because every person has different experience. The varied experiences of the poets absolutely will influence the result of their works.

Related with the statements above, the writer realize that reading poetry is not only reading but also understanding. It happens because the speaker wants to share many things through their focus. Therefore, the readers have to take advantage of the poems. In this case, the readers are the most important subjects in giving the meaning. Here, the readers are free to interpret the poems according to their knowledge. The study of William Wordsworth's "*Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*" reveals how poetry functions not merely as a text to be read but as an experience to be understood and interpreted. Wordsworth's poem is a powerful example of how a speaker navigates personal challenges through the lens of poetic expression.

This study mainly concerns with how the William Wordsworth overcome their problems in life through his poems *Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood*. In this poem, the speaker deals with his loss of visionary gleam in the past. However, the speaker can face and solve their problems in the end. Based on this reason, the writer is curious to know how the speaker overcomes his problems.

In the opening of the poem, Wordsworth reminiscences the time of his childhood. For this period of human life, maximal perception for nature and its miracles is characteristic. Nature has a significant effect on the child. The poet says that everything he saw as a boy was "Apparelled in celestial light" (Wordsworth, 4). Simultaneously, he laments over the fact that he is adult and is not given this gift any more.

*It is not now as it hath been of yore;--
Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen I now can see no more.*
(Wordsworth: 6-9)

Although the poet still appreciates the beauty of landscape, he feels instinctively that there is something missing and that he has lost some connections with nature. He is able to see wonderful natural features but is aware of the difference between the adult and infant sights. He enumerates individual sensations which appear in his mind: the rainbow, the rose, the Moon, the birds' singing, the waterfalls, echoes from the mountains, the wind, and the land and sea. Everything resembles an exhilarating celebration. In spite of grief, the poet feels relief when he has expressed his thoughts.

*A timely utterance gave that thought relief,
And I again am strong:*
(Wordsworth, 23-24)

Then Wordsworth apostrophizes a little shepherd boy, whose happy shout, joy and naturalness remind him of his own childhood. When he views the jubilee and bliss, he cannot

be sullen. However, a memory of a particular tree, a flower, or a field, they all arouse a question:

Whither is fled the visionary gleam?

Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

(Wordsworth, 56-57)

Deferrari et al. (1946, p.445) discusses William Wordsworth's process in composing the "Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood." It mentions that Wordsworth initially halted the poem at a certain point because he was unable to answer a question he had posed. Three years later, he completed the poem, incorporating Plato's doctrine of pre-existence as a way to address the question. This suggests that Wordsworth drew upon philosophical ideas, particularly the notion of the soul's existence before birth, to resolve the thematic concerns of the poem.

In the fifth stanza the reader starts to learn what the cause of the state is. The author claims that these special dispositions start fading since the baby's birth. He compares the human soul to a star which stays somewhere else. The soul is immortal, living in the heaven, when comes to us, remembers his dwelling with God. Childhood is according to the author an ideal phase of everyone's life. Maturing causes that we become more distant from the heaven.

The Youth, who daily farther from the east

Must travel, still is Nature's priest,

And by the vision splendid

Is on his way attended;

At length the Man perceives it die away,

And fade into the light of common day.

(Wordsworth: 71-76)

Peculiar causations are revealed in the sixth stanza. They are certain circumstances connected with human maturing, which distract human mind. Nature endeavors human beings to forget the glorious vision they have brought from their heavenly home.

Therefore, not the man, but nature is responsible for this distance. Using the expression Foster-child Wordsworth indicates that nature is the child's foster mother, because his real father is God.

The homely nurse doth all she can

To make her foster-child, her inmate, Man,

Forget the glories he hath known,

(Wordsworth: 81-83)

Further, William Wordsworth concerns in depicting a small, six-year-old child, who is enchanted by the world around in the center of his parents' love and care. Together with this he predicts child's future full of fortune and misfortune. The poet is aware of both positive and negative events which wait for him. Actually, it is a kind of a plan which urges the little man to move from his naturalness and connection with nature, because he is drawn to people's concerns.

See, at his feet, some little plan or chart,

Some fragment from his dream of human life,

Shaped by himself with newly-learned art;

(Wordsworth: 90-92)

During the process of aging and maturing, the person learns a lot of new things-to communicate with other people about love, business, or strife. He is engaged in social relationships and masters social skills and a lot of new things. He is proud of his improvement. The boy imitates other people and does not live his own life, he is like an actor and the life is a stage. In this part Wordsworth made an allusion on Shakespeare's famous quote.

The little actor cons another part;

Filling from time to time his 'humorous stage'

(Wordsworth: 102-103)

He adopts manners of older people whose behavior is a pattern for him. The endless imitation seems the man's vocation. This idea is close to R. W. Emerson, who considered conformity, abidance in traditions and following rules inherited from our ancestors harmful for human originality and greatness.

Nevertheless, the author is grateful for the hints of immortality and recollections of the heavenly life. They enrich human life and assist to cope with misfortunes. He calls them "the fountain light of all our day" (151), "a master light of all our seeing" (152). Our lives are only short moments in comparison with eternity, therefore we can believe that our soul is immortal.

The poet does not want to cry for the loss of glorious vision but is determined to live with the remains of this special capability and rejoice at the wonders which he can perceive. He is even happy when he realizes that the hints of immortality bring people hope for eternal life.

*In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering;
In the faith that looks through death,
In years that bring the philosophic mind.*
(Wordsworth: 182-185)

Speaker's love for nature remains and is even deeper presently, when he is older and more experienced. He also expresses his acknowledgements to other people and their emotions, which cultivated his mind.

*Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.*
(Wordsworth: 200-203)

Wordsworth proposed this theory as a shadowy notion rather than a definite belief. As a poetic device it serves to emphasize the sensitive nature of the child and the transition from childhood to manhood. For Wordsworth childhood embodies a stage of human life when a man is nearest to nature and God and is in his most perceptive period. It is believed that children have special capabilities to see things which the adult cannot.

After analyzing the poem, the writer knows that the speaker can overcome his fear and be resolute in mind after the encounter with the leech gatherer. He learns about optimism and endurance, thus he can defeat his fear and start facing his future life optimistically. While in Ode: Intimations of Immortality, of which problem concerns with the loss of visionary gleam in childhood, the thesis writer detects that the speaker is still burdened with the loss at present. He cannot accept the loss and keep searching for it. Through the figure of a child, the speaker can finally realize that the loss is a natural process. It is a consequence of growing up to be a man. Along with this realization, the speaker can face and accept the loss. He knows that his effort to seek and bring back the loss will be useless. In summary, Wordsworth's poetry illustrates a progression from struggle to acceptance. The speaker's journey in each poem reflects broader themes of personal development, the natural progression of life, and the search for meaning in the face of change.

CONCLUSIONS

The study of how William Wordsworth addresses and overcomes his personal struggles through "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" reveals the profound role that poetry and philosophical reflection played in his life. Through this poem, Wordsworth confronts the inevitable loss of childhood innocence and the deep sense of spiritual connection to nature that wanes with age. However, rather than succumbing to despair, he channels his feelings of loss into a creative process that leads to a deeper understanding of life and the human condition. Wordsworth's exploration of themes such as memory, nature, and the concept of immortality allows him to reconcile with the challenges

he faces. By embracing the idea of the soul's pre-existence and the enduring influence of childhood experiences, he finds a sense of continuity and meaning that transcends the temporal losses of adulthood. His use of nature as a source of solace and spiritual renewal further demonstrates his ability to draw strength from the world around him. Ultimately, Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality" illustrates how art can serve as a powerful tool for personal healing and philosophical inquiry. The poem not only reflects his own journey toward acceptance and resilience but also offers readers a framework for finding peace in the midst of life's inevitable changes. Through this work, Wordsworth transforms his struggles into a timeless meditation on the enduring power of the human spirit.

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